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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: August 10, 2007

Wabl Appointed Climate Representative

¶1. Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer of the Social Democrats (SPOe) has appointed Green Party politician Andreas Wabl as his personal representative for climate issues. Gusenbauer said Wabl will oversee projects to combat climate change and manage special funds allocated by the coalition government for environmental protection issues. The OeVP and the opposition parties FPOe and BZOe have harshly criticized the Chancellor's move. Criticism of Wabl's appointment has also come from Gusenbauer's own party, the SPOe. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung writes that while discussing the appointment of Andreas Wabl from the Greens as his personal climate representative, Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (SPOe) pointed out that in the past ambitious targets had been set for greenhouse gas emission reductions, but they had been poorly implemented. Gusenbauer added that his coalition partners in the People's Party (OeVP) had not been consulted about Wabl's appointment since "the position was entirely my responsibility." The 56 year old Wabl is a founding member of the Greens Party in Austria and a former MP. Wabl's previous engagement in climate policy was very ambitious, according to Gusenbauer, who stressed that Wabl was quite competent in environment and climate matters. All other Austrian media also report on the issue, emphasizing that the Chancellor's decision was met with harsh criticism, not only from the Social Democrats' coalition partner OeVP, the opposition parties FPOe and BZOe, but also from within the SPOe itself. In an interview with mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich, Wabl says that "hopefully, the Chancellor's efforts will trigger a dynamism, which might even give support to others responsible for climate issues, as for example Environment Minister Josef Proell. There's a lot on the agenda, but with the assistance of experts, and an excellent team, we will be able to do much."

Interview with Gabi Burgstaller

¶2. Leader of the Salzburg provincial Social Democrats and SPOe deputy leader Gabi Burgstaller in an interview with a leading Austrian daily criticizes what she describes as the coalition parties' "petty wars." In an interview with centrist daily Die Presse, SPOe deputy leader and Salzburg Governor Gabi Burgstaller says she had expected the grand coalition "to be much more focused on goals and objectives. Just like the Austrian people, I have no appreciation for the many petty wars and squabbles." However, "when it comes to the really big issues, there usually is [cooperation], as for example on the double budget for 2007 and 2008. So, all the coalition partners would have to do after summer recess is to cut back on the squabbling and get

some serious work done." Asked about a first-past-the-post voting system, Burgstaller suggested there were "very interesting discussions about it. Any democratic system should be scrutinized closely from time to time. Personally, I have always preferred the broadest possible cooperation of all forces, but more often than not that is just plain theory. In reality, the majority (of parties and groups) would rather emphasize how they differ from others."

No State of Emergency in Pakistan

¶3. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has rejected calls to declare emergency powers, and wants Pakistan's elections to go ahead as planned. There has been growing speculation Musharraf was considering declaring a state of emergency after he called off a visit to Afghanistan earlier this week. Pakistan is currently facing an increasingly volatile security situation, as well as internal political problems. US President George Bush has meanwhile urged Pakistan to hold free and fair elections. ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal quotes US President George Bush, who was pleased at President Musharraf's announcement rejecting calls to declare emergency powers, and to go ahead with the Pakistani elections as planned: "My focus in terms of the domestic scene there is that they have a free and fair election, and that's what we've been talking with [Musharraf] about and hopefully they will," the US President said. Centrist daily Die Presse in an analysis suggests that the Pakistani "rulers cannot shake off the Islamic ghosts any more." The "military's control of the country's political life engendered resistance, including that of radical Islamist" groups, the daily says. Following the siege of the Red Mosque in Islamabad, Pervez Musharraf has "become himself increasingly isolated. Nevertheless, the situation offers the chance for a formation of a coalition of anti-Jihadist forces in Pakistan, which would have to include the country's generals and democratic parties." After all, Musharraf can "bank on the support of the people, who are opposed to a further Islamization of the country." Still, the Presse warns, it remains to be seen whether Pakistan has not already embarked on a course eventually leading to an Iraq-like situation."

Earlier Passenger Information Checks

¶4. The US Department of Homeland Security announced Thursday that it is changing its handling of aviation security: For international flights, air carriers flying to and from the United States will have to provide passenger manifest information 30 minutes prior to departure, which will then be checked against watch lists. Previously, the US government was not receiving that information until planes were en route. According to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, the new regulation will give US Customs and Border Protection authorities more time to check names, says ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.

Gadhafi's Son Says Medics Were Tortured

¶5. The son of Libya's leader, Seif al-Islam Gadhafi, has said the six medics from Bulgaria and Palestine, who were imprisoned for allegedly deliberately infecting children in Libya with HV, were tortured in captivity. Gadhafi told al Jzeera television that Libyan investigators had tortured the medics with electric shocks and had threatened to target their families. However, he denied his country would face legal action for mistreating the medics, according to independent provincial daily [Salzburger Nachrichten]. Kilner